



January 19, 2011

**Testimony before Health & Human Services Subcommittee  
Re: Children's Mental Health Budget**

Mister Chair and Members of the subcommittee:

My name is Lora Cowee and I am the Director of Operations with Intermountain. I have worked at Intermountain for 18 years in a variety of roles including direct care for 9 years. Intermountain is one of many provider members of the Montana Children's Initiative (MCI) association. Our association not only represents providers, but also those children and families we work with in communities across Montana as well as the thousands of employees we have in a variety of communities. Intermountain has been providing services for over a 100 years and as of 2010, we served over 1000 children and their families in a variety of inpatient and outpatient settings in Montana. Intermountain employees 180 people across Montana to serve these 1000 children.

I have worked at Intermountain since graduating from college and it has been my mission to serve children and families since that time. Having worked 9 years of direct care in the residential services, I can attest at how difficult the work is emotionally and physically. The shifts are hard on a family and can be very long. The pay is never enough it seems to compensate for the toll it takes on you. Despite this, many direct care workers continue to work in this field because it is their mission in life to help others despite the obstacles faced. One thing that has been extremely helpful is the Direct Care Wage increase that was passed into legislation in 2007. This has helped providers give some increase in salary directly to workers who work directly with the children; despite providers lack of rate increase, increase in licensing requirements, and declining economy. Intermountain has worked hard over the years to retain employees and we pay employees as much as we can based on our budget and try to provide other benefits such as additional training. We have been successful and our average tenure of direct care staff is about 5 years. The national average of direct care workers according to CWLA is 6 months.

Having been at Intermountain for 18 years, I have been fortunate to see many of the children I worked directly with become adults and have their own children. They all share with me one consistent theme when I ask them what helped them during their treatment at Intermountain the most--the staff whom they formed relationships with. These are the people changing the lives of children.

Please remember that as you make very difficult decisions with the budget, that when you decide on the Children's Mental Health Bureau budget you are making decisions about children and families lives and also the livelihood of the many staff we employ.

Please support the Children's Mental Health of DPHHS budget. I also ask that you continue to support the Direct Care Wage increase that supports wages for employees. Thank you.

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